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12-7-2001

### University of Nebraska Board of Regents/ Academic Affairs Committee: Engagement with Community

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UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA BOARD OF REGENTS  
ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE  
ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITY  
DECEMBER 7, 2001  
DR. JOHN OWENS  
VICE PRESIDENT FOR AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
HARLAN VICE CHANCELLOR FOR THE  
INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Board of Regents and President Smith: It's a real pleasure to be able to discuss the University's role in engagement with you today <sup>on behalf of the four</sup> campuses that comprise the University of Nebraska.

In preparing this presentation I've drawn heavily upon the Kellogg Commission's report, entitled: *"Returning to our Roots - The Engaged Institution,"* and the Michigan State University <sup>guidebook</sup> for planning and evaluating quality outreach, which is entitled: *"Points of Distinction."* I think <sup>both</sup> publications offer <sup>valuable insights</sup> as we <sup>explore</sup> the University's role as an <sup>engaged partner</sup> with Nebraska.

**Engagement** as we'll talk about it today is <sup>firmly rooted</sup> in the University's land grant mission, which calls upon <sup>us</sup> to take the riches and resources of the University to the people of Nebraska. University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension offers us <sup>a solid base</sup> for that mission, with <sup>a presence</sup> in all 93 counties in the state. Engagement is carried out across <sup>all four</sup> campuses in a variety of ways

- by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, a comprehensive university with a ~~"statewide mission"~~ in learning, discovery, and engagement; University of Nebraska at Omaha as the state's ~~"metropolitan university"~~; University of Nebraska at Kearney, established nearly a century ago as a teachers college with ~~"today's proud heritage"~~ of focusing on ~~"undergraduate teaching"~~; and University of Nebraska Medical Center, dedicated to improving the health of all Nebraska.

As a ~~"university-system"~~ we deliver ~~"a wide-variety"~~ of programs and activities ~~"aimed at meeting the needs and enriching the lives of Nebraska citizens. We explore the needs and concerns of our constituents, and we work with them to meet those same needs and concerns."~~

Engagement goes well beyond conventional outreach and ~~"most conceptions"~~ of public service, which emphasize a one-way process in which the University ~~"transfers"~~ its expertise to key constituents. Engagement is ~~"well-grounded"~~ in the scholarly activity of the University. And, as envisioned here, engagement is ~~a "partnership,"~~ a two-way street defined by ~~"mutual respect"~~ among partners for "what" "each" brings to the table. Engagement is a shared ~~value and~~ action around which (or through which) the University and its constituents ~~"collaborate."~~ When the University and its constituents are ~~"engaged with each other"~~ in this way we build ~~"better programs"~~ and ~~"workable solutions"~~ based on a mutual respect and give-and-take

between the University and the citizens of Nebraska.

Engagement ~~programs and activities~~ are built at the local level, based on what is needed to meet the locally-determined need. Some engagement opportunities occur in the neighborhoods of the cities where a University of Nebraska campus is located, and some occur across the state, in counties, in townships, and in communities. An emerging engagement effort in which all four campuses of the University system are involved is the University of Nebraska Rural Initiative, which focuses on concerns of rural Nebraska. The Rural Initiative was the subject of this afternoon's General Affairs Committee meeting.

An engaged University is created through partnerships. Partnerships that comprise engagement are illustrated in the EDGE program ongoing in Nebraska. We all know adequate job opportunities are essential to small town survival and growth. Some rural Nebraskans are creating their own jobs and businesses with help from a University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension program.

Nebraska EDGE – Enhancing, Developing, and Growing Entrepreneurs – is an umbrella organization for rural entrepreneurial training programs hosted by local communities, organizations, and associations. Entrepreneurs teach EDGE courses for business owners looking to expand and for potential business owners. Participants learn legal structures, market strategies, financial statements,

bookkeeping, cash flow, financing, and how to manage growth. Nearly 900 existing-  
and-potential Nebraska business owners have participated in EDGE since it began  
in 1993. About half of those participants started or expanded their businesses,  
creating more than 500 new jobs, mostly in rural communities.

Over the past three decades, numerous University of Nebraska at Omaha  
College of Public Affairs and Community Service faculty and staff and dozens of  
students have engaged in delivering applied research, technical assistance, and  
collaborative outreach projects directly benefitting some of the city's most  
economically-challenged neighborhoods, as well as the greater metropolitan area.  
These initiatives include the UNO Community Outreach Partnership Center,  
Neighborhood Builders, the Neighborhood Center for Greater Omaha, the  
Community Fellows program, and numerous service-learning and capstone projects.  
They embrace UNO's vision "to be of the community, not simply in the community."  
Currently, all of the College of Public Affairs and Community Service neighborhood-  
initiatives primarily are funded through external sources in the form of federal and  
foundation grants and endowments, while the College contributes in-kind matches.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Architecture participates in  
the Lied Main Street Program in partnership with the Departments of Roads and  
Economic Development, as well as the State Historical Society. The College serves

some 14 communities and a like-number of associate-communities through the program. Graduate students in architecture and community-and-regional planning provide design-and-planning-services for participating-communities. The College works with communities, and more specifically business owners, on preserving and enhancing historic-buildings that traditionally make-up communities' main streets. The historic preservation and design work is only one part of the Main Street program.

The University of Nebraska Medical Center, in collaboration with the South Omaha Community Care Council, has developed two successful bilingual programs in parenting and diabetes education. And, working with the North Omaha Community Care Council, the Medical Center has developed an asthma education program in collaboration with the Omaha-Asthma-Alliance and Parents of Asthmatics. The program targets youth at high risk and provides activities centered on learning how to control and manage asthma. Parent-seminars provide information on asthma management.

For four years now, the SHARING Clinic has opened each-Tuesday for Omaha's poorest residents. SHARING is the acronym for Student Health Alliance Reaching Indigent Needy Groups. It's staffed and operated by NU Medical Center students and faculty, including volunteers from the medical, pharmacy, and nursing-schools.

schools. Since it began, the clinic has served more than 1,000 patients; many are recent immigrants. A 12-person interdisciplinary student board handles all clinic business.

The NU Medical Center has developed a partnership with ConAgra Foods to provide regularly-scheduled health screenings, health education and prevention information, and other healthcare resources to ConAgra employees in Grand Island and Omaha. The group also works to provide information in areas of nutrition, housing, transportation, employment, education, immigration, and childcare and parenting resources. The first year will target implementation in Omaha and Grand Island, with service to other communities in the second year.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha's College of Information Science and Technology has created a Division for Applied Information Technology designed to provide assistance to the business community through student internships, special studies courses designed around specific business projects, and faculty-led projects that involve student participation. DiscoverWhy, TSI, Reliant Global, Relapoint, and Mobile Decisions are five companies now working with the College of Information Science and Technology on pilot projects. In each case, the goal is to develop educational offerings around business applications using technological expertise and led by technology fellows. This semester the college has a special —

course for TSI. Students are working with faculty and business professionals to help design advanced software for customized business applications.

The University of Nebraska at Kearney Speech and Hearing Science Laboratory in the College of Education's Department of Communication Disorders annually provides evaluation and therapeutic services to more than 1,000 Nebraskans throughout central and western Nebraska who have speech and hearing disabilities. Over 19,000 hours of assessment and therapy are provided to children and adults in the region under the auspices of this laboratory/clinic.

The Midwest Conference on World Affairs, held annually in Kearney, brings together American and international scholars, diplomats, and public figures. The program is designed to promote international education and understanding. Over a period of three days the UNK community can meet and discuss a variety of international issues and perspectives, including the impact of globalization on Nebraska business strategies. Conference events and discussion programs always are free, open to the public, and attended by hundreds of citizens from the community, region, and area high schools, as well as UNK faculty, staff, and students. Oscar Arias, former president of Costa Rica and the 1987 recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, will be the keynote speaker at this spring's conference.

One of the ways the University system engages with the state is by working



with elementary and secondary schools throughout Nebraska. For example, The Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium is a collaboration of the University of Nebraska at Omaha's College of Education and the seven public school districts in the metropolitan Omaha area. The Consortium provides a voice for mutual concerns as it represents 100,000 students and over 8,300 certified professionals.

The Consortium's mission is improving communication, efficiency, and effectiveness among participating school districts and the college. The collaboration inherent in Consortium activities and purposes is essential to the college, the university, and the community.

~~The Platte River Corridor Project~~, funded by a grant from the Department of Education, is a partnership between the University of Nebraska at Kearney and 10 area schools that will provide training to 150 teachers, increase bilingual resources in partner schools, and establish an information network across the region to support teachers working with Limited English Proficiency students.

Faculty in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Teachers College conduct research on school consolidation and school construction for school districts throughout Nebraska. They work with school leaders to collect and analyze data that assist the school in making decisions about bond issues and school mergers. They also serve as team leaders and team members for school accreditation teams

throughout Nebraska, engaging with those at the schools.

Another example of work with secondary schools is the nation's first rural agricultural sciences magnet school located within Mead High School, the curriculum for which this fall has been expanded to Burwell Junior-Senior High School, Nebraska City High School, and Laurel-Concord High School. A magnet school draws together students with similar interests – in this case, “agricultural sciences” emphasizing biotechnology, precision agriculture, global positioning, and more. Although fewer than 2 percent of the nation's population is involved with production agriculture, in Nebraska one in four jobs depends on it.”

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, the UNL College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, School at the Center from UNL Teachers College, College of Arts and Sciences, and Cynthia Milligan, dean of the College of Business Administration, representing the Kellogg Foundation, all have collaborated with University partners to provide this programming for Nebraska.

We are looking to Cooperative Extension, with its presence in every county, as the tie to move the program across Nebraska.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Department of Theatre Arts in the Hixson-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts has taken productions to Nebraska communities. Right now they're preparing to take a production called

*Little Humpback Horse*, based on a Russian Folk Tale, to *Broken Bow* in March.

The department is working on a proposal to develop a touring company to visit communities throughout Nebraska that normally don't have the opportunity to attract such productions. The School of Music, also in the College, is working with the UNL Department of English, planning a tour and seeking funding to take the opera *Bohemian Girl*, based on the life of Willa Cather, to Red Cloud and possibly to other communities.

Another way we take the resources of the University to the state, engaging with Nebraska residents as we do so, is through arts and artifacts. The Museum of Nebraska Art, or MONA, which is part of the University of Nebraska at Kearney, is the home of the Nebraska Art Collection, the official art-collection of the State of Nebraska. Housed in the former Kearney Post Office, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the Museum features artwork of Nebraskans, about Nebraska. MONA hosts exhibits by renowned artists and presents lectures and film series, music programs, and educational activities for surrounding communities and schools.

The Bethsaida Excavations Project is a consortium of universities and colleges from around the world that have joined together to excavate the ancient city of Bethsaida, interpret the data gathered, and disseminate the results to both

academic and popular audiences. Formed in 1990, the project is housed at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

In addition to the archaeological work, the Bethsaida Project hosts campus- and community-based events that bring the ancient world to the people of Nebraska. Public lectures, movie premieres, educational symposia, and exhibits are held regularly and draw upon a local support base of several hundred people.

These are only a few of the many examples that demonstrate University of Nebraska engagement with the state. There are many, many more examples.

To foster the essential engagement that partners Nebraska and Nebraskans with the University, we at the University constantly must be looking forward, listening to our partners, organized to respond to the needs of *today's* and *tomorrow's* students and stakeholders, not yesterday's. We must enrich the learning experiences designed through engagement, bringing research and outreach into the curriculum and the programs that evolve through it. We must focus the University's critical resources, which are knowledge and expertise, to address the problems faced by the communities throughout the state that the University serves.

Five key strategies are needed to advance engagement:

1) We must transform our thinking so engagement becomes a priority on every campus, and a central part of our institutional mission.

2) We must encourage interdisciplinary scholarship and research, including interdisciplinary teaching and learning opportunities.

3) We must develop incentives to encourage faculty involvement in our engagement effort.

4) We must secure stable funding to support engagement.

5) We must develop a plan for engagement that effectively measures seven guiding characteristics of an engaged University. They are: responsiveness; respect for partners; academic neutrality; accessibility; integration of the engagement mission with the responsibilities for developing intellectual capital and teaching intelligence; <sup>and</sup> coordination of issues; resourceful partnerships.

There are real challenges to creating genuine learning communities, encouraging lifelong learning, finding effective ways to overcome barriers to change, and building greater social and human capital in our communities. Those of us in the University must do our very best to be good partners with Nebraska and its citizens to overcome those challenges. Engagement, with its University and community partnerships, will help address these challenges. It can put the University to work on the practical problems facing Nebraska today.

Engagement may seem a lot to ask, but Nebraska citizens have the right to ask a lot from this great university. The engagement we've talked about today is no less an ambitious vision for the universities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century than was Justin Morrill's 19<sup>th</sup> century vision that brought land-grant universities into being in 1862 when the Morrill Act was signed by Abraham Lincoln. If the University of Nebraska is successful, future historians will continue to celebrate our historic land-grant university contributions because we as an institution insisted we could do more - and we could do it better. Many of us throughout the University of Nebraska system find the potential for expanding the University's engagement role particularly exciting. Thank you.

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DEAN ELBERT DICKER

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